

# Our Survey Story

Bhima Sangha  
by and  
Makkala Panchayat





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by

**Bhima Sangha    and    Makkala Panchayat**

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Published by : The Concerned for Working Children  
303/2, L.B. Shastri Nagar, Vimanapura  
Bangalore, India – 560 017

**e-mail: cwc@pobox.com**

**Website: www.workingchild.org**

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Namma Bhoomi  
Kanyana post, Kundapur  
Karnataka, India – 576 230

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First Edition : 2001  
Printed at : SPAN Print  
24 'A' Cross, Karesandra,  
Banashankari IIInd Stage  
Bangalore – 560 070

Design, Illustration : Veena Sonwalkar  
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# Foreword . . . .

Ever since our inception we, the Concerned for working Children (CWC), have been grappling with the area of 'research'. Being primarily activists, we were never good at making sense of tables, charts and complicated progressions. It was only with difficulty and some discipline that we taught ourselves to understand these. One of the few uses we found for traditional research was to quote them to substantiate our own experience.

In the late 70s when we started our work in the field of child labour, there was very little available in the way of valid data or serious analysis of the issue. Our initial forays into getting a deeper knowledge of child labour were useful to us as well as to the general debate on child labour and contributed another dimension to the sparse body of knowledge that already existed.



We had always recognised the importance of information as a basis for our programming and strategic planning, but relevant information was rarely available. The secondary data we had access to was always out of date, a description of trends past, a bird's eye view where the micro situations were subsumed. For us and the children we work with, the field reality was dynamic and constantly changing. What we needed were the specifics with names and faces, not statistics; we needed them here and now.

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For our work in the field, our conventional attempts at research were disappointing. In some of our studies, the children and their families were the objects, our field activists, the data collectors and with our research officer in Bangalore directing the whole process. No one really understood the purpose of the exercise, least of all the children. Our activists soon got frustrated, they did not see this as an integral part of their work, it was some additional task not relevant to their day to day work and they soon rebelled especially when asked to repeat and correct information. The results of these research exercises took very long to process. When the results were finally available they made little sense to the field staff or the kids.



It was only when the children of Bhima Sangha<sup>1</sup> and the Makkala Panchayats<sup>2</sup> felt the need to collect information about their villages that we began helping children to carry out Participatory Rapid Appraisals (PRAs) that they used to collect information about their villages. These unconventional methods were exciting, empowering and extremely useful to both strategic planning and programming.

However, soon the children found that they needed more specific data and made a request to us to give them the skills to carry out a door-to-door survey of over 7500 households.

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<sup>1</sup> Union of working children in Karnataka facilitated the Concerned for Working Children, with a membership of over 13,000, striving for the realisation of child rights.

<sup>2</sup> Children's Village Councils set up in Karnataka jointly by Bhima Sangha and the Concerned for Working Children. It is a forum for all children to participate in the process of decision making and governance in the village.



The whole experience was a very sharp learning curve for us all as we began to understand the power of applied action research. We still made some mistakes as the threads of conventional research still lingered and so we had to do some damage control along the way.

The children carried out the survey in 10 months and produced a wealth of data. We requested Mr. Julian Kramer, a consultant to CWC to facilitate a process documentation workshop. During this workshop we found that the children had already begun to act on their findings and we had not even correlated the data yet!

The whole concept of research is turned on its head when the subjects turned researchers and protagonists. The children generated the data, they are using it to transform their lives and they keep updating the data and track changes and progress. The Panchayat<sup>3</sup> sees them as a source of valuable information. For instance, they ask the Makkala Panchayat (Children's Panchayat) to decide the beneficiaries for Ashraya Houses<sup>4</sup>, to give them the list of households below the poverty line and to decide beneficiaries for other schemes. The children own the information and it has empowered them beyond imagination.

Now the field programme is working with relevant data on a day-to-day basis. The Makkala Panchayats can track every single child in the village and intervene when necessary to remedy situations immediately. Research has been a very empowering process for the children and us. We have demystified the principles of research. Now data and information have become our close friends.

**Nandana Reddy**  
**Director Development**  
October - 2001

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<sup>3</sup> Panchayat is the lowest level of administration in the system of local government. The term Panchayat refers to both the geographical and administrative units, as well as the elected body of governance, which acts as the local council. A Panchayat is composed of a cluster of villages and several Panchayats constitute a taluq.

<sup>4</sup> The Ashraya Scheme is government subsidised housing to those below the poverty line.



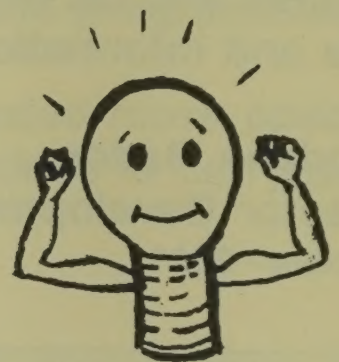
# Introduction

From September 1998 to June 1999 Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats carried out a house to house survey in their villages. The survey was done in eight panchayats. About 270 children, all members of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats, conducted the survey. The formation of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats has been facilitated by the Concerned for Working Children (CWC), an NGO, which is based in Karnataka, India.



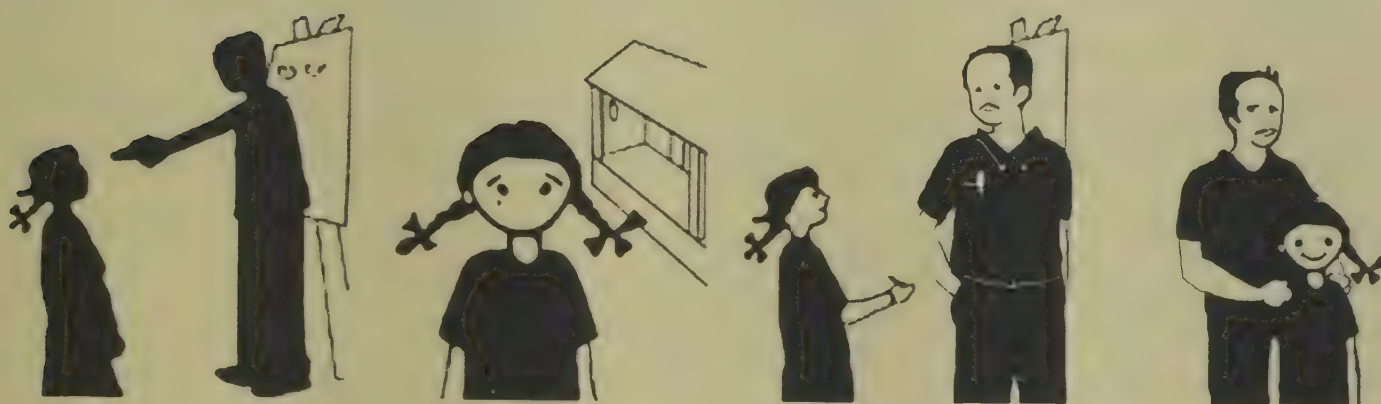
In April 1999, I was asked by CWC to facilitate a 3-day workshop in Bangalore with some of the working children and adults who had been involved in the survey, in order to document some of the processes related to carrying out the survey.

The most important impression I have from the workshop is a confirmation of the old maxim that 'Knowledge is Power'. This rather trite saying gained a new meaning for me when interacting with the children and seeing what this experience had meant to them. According to the children the survey had not only given them new insights into the factors defining their lives. It had also increased their self-confidence and had gained them respect and recognition from their families and community.





As one of the participants at the workshop put it: “I studied in a school where the teacher had ill-treated me saying that I was fit only to break the neck of fish. I left the school many years ago because of this. During the survey I had to interview this teacher. He did not remember me but I reminded him about what he had told me. He was extremely surprised to see me conducting a survey. His attitude towards me totally changed and he said that I spoke with a lot of confidence and he was proud that I was doing this survey.”



For the children the main reason for collecting information is that it should be used. They wanted to be able to take the results of the survey back to their villages in order to identify what could be done to improve the situation of children in their villages. The children were therefore involved in discussions with the adult researchers about how the information from the survey should be systematised and correlated in order that they would be in a position to use it in discussions with adult decision makers in their villages. The survey covered about 7500 households in the 24 villages of 8 Panchayats. The adult research team was to systematise this information as a whole, as well as develop statistical booklets for each of the villages and Panchayats according to the suggestions of the children.

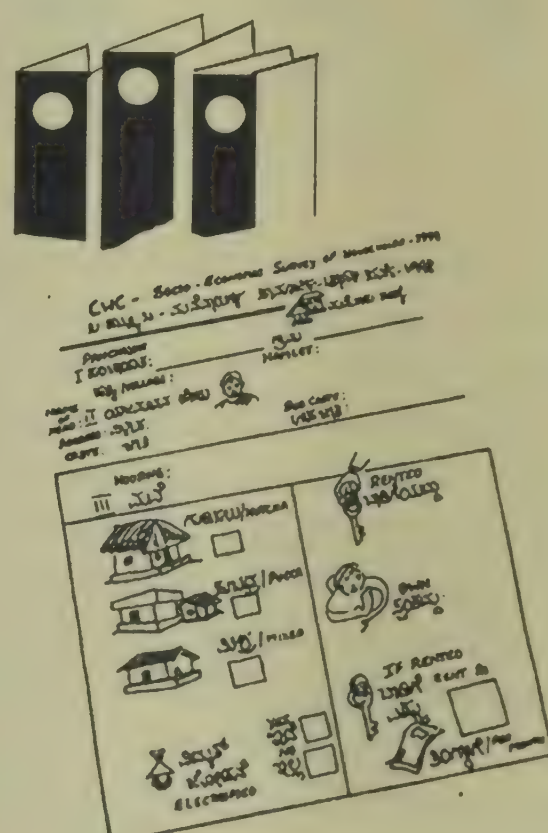




The survey was originally conceived by CWC who also developed the first draft of the questionnaire that was used. The children however were actively involved in suggesting changes to the questionnaire. They were responsible for all the data collection and they were also highly involved in deciding on how the data should be analysed. As a result there was a definite feeling of ownership of the process. The children clearly expressed that this was their survey and that they clearly saw how they would be able to use the results.

The children showed a high degree of commitment in getting the survey done. They had to somehow find the time to interview people in addition to their work, attending the extension school and doing household chores. This was not always easy, but through rescheduling activities, helping each other or convincing their parents or employers for time off, they managed to find the necessary time.

But since the children were true 'action researchers' they did not only sit back and wait for the results of the correlation before taking action. During the course of the survey they discovered a number of concrete problems relating to children as well as the other members of the communities. They did not just let these issues lie, but took them up with the relevant authorities and solved them. An example of this is that in one village the children from a particular household had not been enrolled in school. The child researchers took this up with the headmaster and the children were subsequently enrolled.





It was a fascinating experience to interact with this group of children, several of whom had very little, if any, formal schooling. In spite of that they had a very good and nuanced understanding of what the implications of the survey were. They had realised that not all the information they had gathered was of the same quality. Some of the information they were completely confident mirrored the real situation of the families concerned. But what the head of households told them about certain issues, especially related to income, land-holdings, indebtedness (important issues which have implications for why children in most families do some form of work or another) was not always true. They therefore tried to substantiate this through other sources that they thought might be more reliable, such as the ration shop or the land recording office.

The way in which the research was done also highlighted the difference between doing research for academic reasons, or as part of a large scale impersonal project, as opposed to interested parties trying to collect information in a systematic way in order to understand their own situation and do something about it. Several of the children also stated explicitly that this exercise has raised their confidence in their ability to gather relevant and useful information. In addition they also feel that it has enhanced their esteem in the eyes of their parents and other adult members of the community.

This experience should also be seen as contributing to the discussion on how children can be involved in research in a meaningful way. There has been some work done on how adult researchers should relate to children as informants. These children, however, have been involved, not primarily as informants, but as both data collectors as well as partners in defining the issues that should be analysed. The survey has shown that with proper training and guidance children (and by extension, other marginalised groups) can collect information in a systematic way and contribute fruitfully to the analysis and conversion of the information into plans of action.

**Julian Kramer<sup>4</sup>**  
**(Save the Children, Norway)**

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<sup>4</sup> Julian Kramer is the Special Policy Advisor to Save the Children Norway and a consultant to CWC.

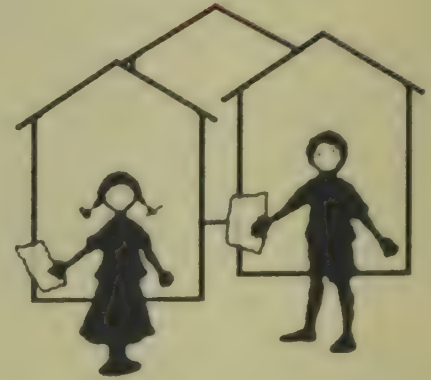




# Our Story

## Thoughts about the Survey

In 1995, we the members of Bhima Sangha, Makkala Panchayats, the adults of our communities and the staff of The Concerned for Working Children (CWC) carried out an 'Odanata' (Participatory Rapid Appraisal). We, children and adults together got to know the situation of the village. The factors which make work inevitable to children had to be changed. Based on the information we collected through the Odanata, we had prepared action plans, which helped us to address some of our problems.



But when people from our villages as well as other villages asked us questions about our problems we answered them with approximate figures (statistics). We felt that we should collect detailed information about our villages in order to give people accurate information.

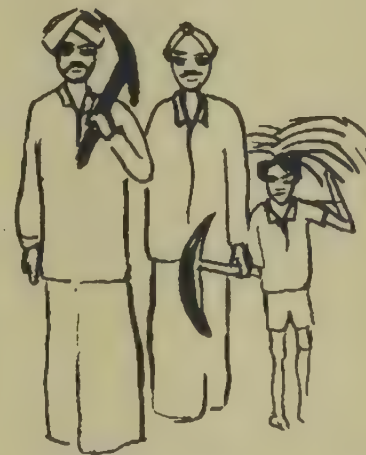
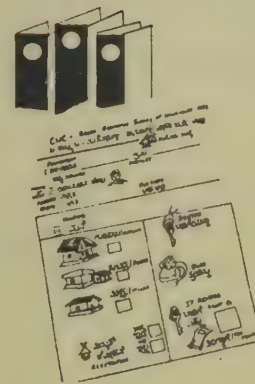
This information was also needed by CWC to solve the problems identified through the Odanata. We realised that the information we got in the Odanata was not enough to solve the problems. For more and complete information we thought of doing a house to house survey. This survey was carried out over a period of ten months, between September 1998 and June 1999.





# The purpose of the survey

- To get complete information about the financial and social situation of the Panchayat.
- To learn about the number of working children and their complete details. For example, to gather information about adult and child migrants, whether they are members of Bhima Sangha, what is their situation, etc.
- To find out the problems and difficulties of people and to put together all the statistics and to give that information to the village Panchayat. To take the help of the Panchayat and solve the problems of the village.
- To collect information about the previous generation and to learn about household.
- To help working children of the village obtain their rights.





## Why we did the survey

- To conduct a survey we have to obtain information. If we have knowledge as well as skills, it will be helpful to us. Then we will know how much we already understand about surveys.
- To show that not only adults can carry out surveys, children can also do it. For example, in our village adults conduct surveys. We have no opportunities to take part in the surveys done by them. But now we have an opportunity to do this survey. We are proud to say that now we children have also surveyed, that we can do it and that we will do it.
- We are proud to say that

I have conducted a survey.  
I have got information and  
done a survey on my own.



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We should talk about this with pride to others. From this they will recognise that children can conduct surveys and on top of it recognise that 'we children' have conducted a survey.



- If other working children are given information, they too can do surveys. It is possible for children to carry out a survey in any Panchayat where surveys have not been done. There they do not have information about what a survey is. So, those of us who now have that information should go and inform them about what a survey is, its objective, how to work for it and how the information they gather may be helpful to them. Along with this, if we inform them about the experiences we had during our survey, it will be helpful to them.
- When people from the newspapers, TV and radio question us we can give clear information, if we have accurate information with us.



## How and from whom we got the information to do the survey

- We got information from The Concerned for Working Children (CWC) through training.
- Some members of Makkala Panchayats and Bhima Sangha were part of the resource team that trained us.
- We got information from those working children who had received training in the workshops, from activists, from volunteers, from



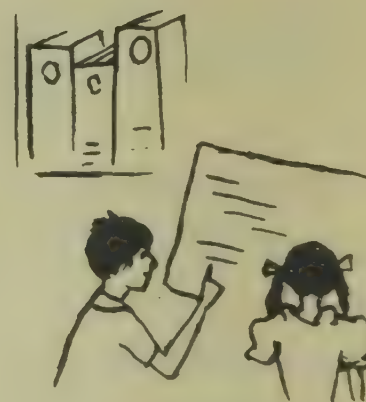
- The training was conducted in Kundapura Taluk at Namma Bhoomi, CWC's Regional Resource Centre, in Bairumbe Panchayat of Sirsi Taluk, in Mathihalli which is located in Harppanahalli Taluk of Davanegere District, and in Holangundi Panchayat in Hadagalli Taluk of Bellary District. Also, training was conducted in a few areas of Alur, Keradi, Balkur, Upunda and Belve Panchayats in Kundapura Taluk.



## How we selected the participants for the training

We ourselves identified the participants who took part in the training. Criteria for selection of children to participate in the training were the following:-

- Children who had the capacity to get information at the workshop and then go to their respective centres and speak about it (to other children and adults) were selected.
- Those who were brave enough to talk were selected.
- Those who were able to understand issues were selected.
- Those children who participate well in activities were selected.
- Those who were able to give time for training were selected.





- In Balkur Panchayat<sup>5</sup>, school children took interest and said ‘we will do the survey’ and came forward to do it.









## Where was the survey done

The survey has been done in 8 Panchayats in Karnataka.

They are Uppunda, Alur, Belve, Keradi and Balkur in Kundapura Taluk of Udupi district, Bairumbe Panchayat of Sirsi Taluk in North Kanara District, Mathihalli Panchayat of Harappanahalli Taluk in Davanagere District and Holagundi Panchayat of the Hoovina Hadagali Taluk, Bellary District.

## Who took part in the Survey

- The President of Bhima Sangha, Vice President of Bhima Sangha and members of Bhima Sangha; the Presidents of Makkala Panchayats, the Vice Presidents and members of Makkala Panchayats and school children carried out the survey. We were all in the age group of 10 to 18 years.
- Number of children who did the survey:

Alur Panchayat		27
Keradi Panchayat		54
Uppunda Panchayat		12
Belve Panchayat		20
Bairumbe Panchayat		28
Holagundi Panchayat		52
Mathihalli Panchayat		50
Balkur Panchayat		27
Total		270

<sup>5</sup> Balkur has been declared child labour free ; there are no working children in the age group of 0-18.

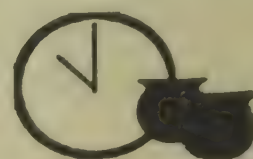


## Survey Timetable

We are working children. We have different things to do at different times, so we made a timetable. First of all, all children sat, discussed and set aside time to do the survey.

For example, (following is the time schedule for one section of children) in Alur Panchayat:

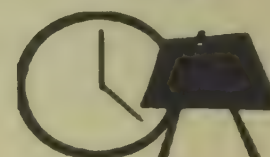
- Morning  
10am – 1pm : Do Pottery



- Afternoon  
2pm – 4pm : Conduct Survey



- Evening  
5pm – 7pm : Attend Extension School



Besides these, we had to adjust our time to do our normal domestic chores such as fetching water and fuel, cooking, taking care of younger siblings, etc.

- In Holagundi Panchayat, those who had work in the morning went to do the survey at night; those who had work in the night went to do the survey in the morning.

- We prepared the time table because we did not want either the survey or our work to be hampered. As Manjunath of Bairumbe Panchayat in Sirsi had to peel a lot of arecanuts, Vishwanath helped him at work. Later both of them went together and did the survey.

- In Keradi when we were preparing the time table we asked a mother 'Can you send your daughter to conduct survey at such and such a time?'. She said, 'Do not ask me. Ask my daughter.' Then we asked the daughter and prepared the time table.



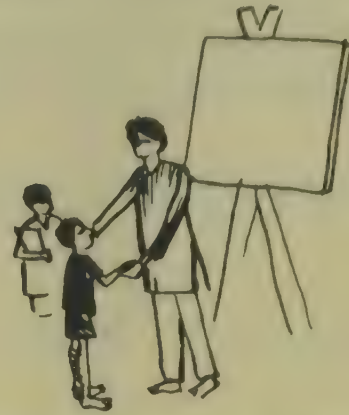
- In Alur Panchayat we had to give the finishing touches to the (terracotta) dolls we were making after the survey. After that, we had housework. It was very difficult to do that much work. Even then we did the survey, because in order to solve our problems there was need for statistics. That is why we did the survey.

## How we did the survey

- We ourselves selected children to undergo the training.
- We received training from CWC. After undergoing the training, those of us who were trained, trained other children in our centers.
- During the time of the survey, we prepared the timetable and shared responsibilities by identifying who would carry out the survey in different areas.
- We first developed relationships with people of the village and enquired about their wellbeing. We ourselves formed groups, took up responsibilities and asked questions about their household situation. We asked people about those who have migrated, people who have deceased, number of children who are working, their age, number of people in the household, the assets of the family and the facilities they lack. These were some of the topics surveyed by us.
- While doing the survey we discussed and learnt all the details. We asked, “What was the occupation of the family in the previous generation? What were the kind of jobs done by your ancestors? What was the income from that occupation? How many years has it been since you started the work? Have you discontinued that work? Or are your children continuing that work? Is the income from that work sufficient to carry on the livelihood of the family?”, etc.



- We asked them “Are the children of your house members of Bhima Sangha? Are they elected members of Makkala Panchayats?”



- We contacted the people who run the milk dairy. Some people who sell milk do not say how much they earn accurately. We contacted the milk dairy and found out the correct details.
- We have got many other pieces of information by asking questions.

## How we convinced people about the survey

When we went house to house to do the survey, the people of the house asked us “What is a survey?” “What is its use?” “What is the purpose of this survey?” and “How will we, the people of the household benefit from it?” These questions were asked in some of the places in the eight Panchayats that we surveyed. Then, because we were able to clearly convince people about the survey, they talked to us about the situation of their households.

In Uppunda and Bairumbe Panchayats, we said “If you keep your problems to yourself, will it be solved? If you talk about it to us, we will talk about it at the Panchayat. So you give us information about yourself”. After that, people trusted us and said “We will give you information”. People who lived close by and people who knew us believed us. If they were not familiar with us, they would not trust us easily.

Here is an example of what happened in Holagundi Panchayat of Bellary District. When we went to a house, the people of the household asked us, “Why are you doing the survey?” Those of us who were



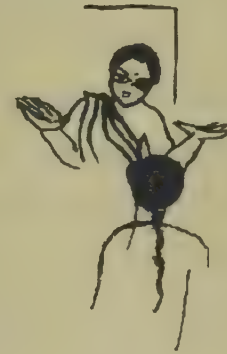
doing the survey told them, “From this survey we will know how many people are working, what is their daily expenditure and such other things. All this is household information. From this we can learn about the problems which families face. Next we can try to find solutions to those problems.”

In the same way we encountered questions in Balkur. When we went to do the survey, the people of the house asked us, “What do we gain from this survey?” What we said was that by doing this survey they will be able to get benefit from the government. Then they became very happy and gave us their response very quickly to the parameters in the survey form.

## Who helped us to do the Survey

To do the survey we got help from the people of the village, school children, teachers, members of the Panchayat, Anganwadi workers, working children, field activists, parents and friends.

**People of the village :** The neighbours of the houses we surveyed gave some information, which was not given by the members of the household.



**School children :** In Balkur, school going children also did the survey. In some places they took us from house to house and gave us explanations. A few of them helped us in writing. For example, Girish of Alur helped his sister this way.

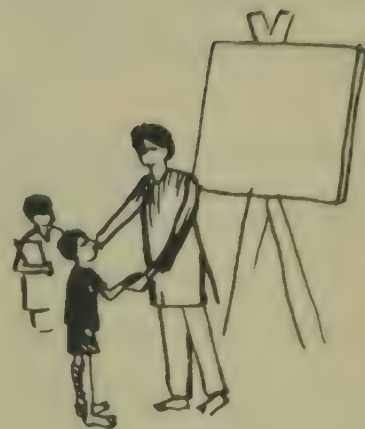


**Teachers :** In some houses the details about when children left school were not known. In such cases where the family members did not have the information, the school teachers told us.

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**Members of the Panchayat :** From them we got information like house numbers, house taxes, land details, details about the facilities got from the government etc. The President of Bairumbe Panchayat went to some houses of the village and told the people “Children will be carrying out a survey; please assist those children to do their survey.” The President of Keradi Panchayat told us how to phrase our questions in different situations. In Balkur when we went to the houses of a few rich people, the President of the Panchayat accompanied us. The forms filled by us were seen by the President, Vice President, anganwadi workers and members of youth groups and they helped us to verify them.



**Working children who have not joined Bhima Sangha :** Working children came with us while we were doing the survey and helped us to do the survey.

**CWC :** CWC helped us to do the survey. They gave us the training to do the survey. When the training given for the first time was not sufficient, they gave us training again. In such cases where children were interested to take part in the survey but their parents were not willing to send them, people from CWC went and spoke to the parents of those children and they made it possible for those children to participate in the survey.





## Uses of the Survey

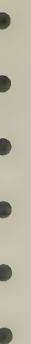
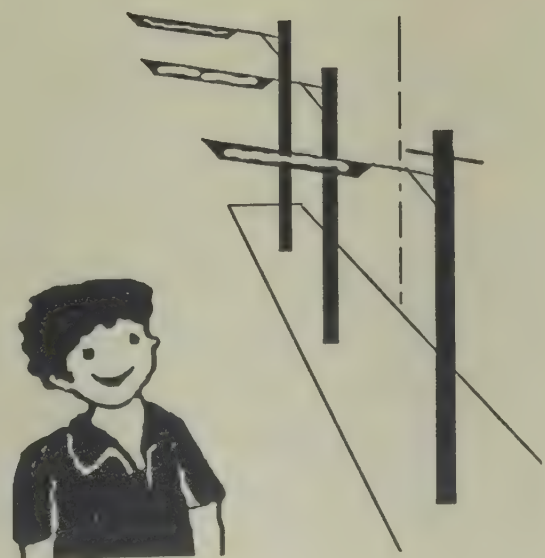
We have surveyed 7573 households. From that we have identified the problems of all the Panchayats, for example, problems of disabled persons, widows, school going children, working children, children who do not go to schools, the aged, people without ration cards, etc. In Belve Panchayat, after identifying the problems we have re-enrolled children who had left school and filed pension applications for widows and disabled persons.

In Alur a boy named Gopala had been brought from Gadag and kept in a house to do house work. When we went to do the survey in that house, he did not tell us his name and the name of his village clearly. Then when we enquired about him with the neighbours they told us his story. We then placed the problem before CWC. The members of CWC met his parents and enrolled him in the Vocational Training Centre run by the organisation in Kundapura.

In the Bhavihalli village of Holagundi Panchayat there was a problem of street lights. We identified this problem through the survey and informed the Panchayat of this problem and solved it.

In Devarakeri village of Bairumbe Panchayat, thirty people had problems related to water. We identified that through the survey and got the borewell repaired by the Panchayat.

We have identified many more problems. Makkala Panchayats and members of Bhima Sangha and other working children of the Panchayats are talking to their respective Panchayats in order to solve their problems. For example, through the Panchayats we are trying to make electricity available to those who do not have it, repair drains next to the roads, make houses available to those who do not have it, make water available to those who have water problem and get bridges built where necessary. We describe all the problems in the village to the concerned people.





Because we have taken part in the survey, we are receiving respect from our teachers and children. Those people who had looked down upon us in the past are now giving us recognition and respect.

I am Prema from Uppunda Panchayat. When we went to do the survey, the teacher who had taught me said 'Now you have become very sharp'. Then I said, when I used to come to the school you had told me that I was good enough only to break fish necks. I am the same girl.



Through the survey we have made friends with those who opposed us.

### Lessons learnt from the survey

- We have learnt to conduct surveys on our own.
- We have learnt to share our experiences with those who have no experience of a survey.
- After completing the survey we have identified problems which we did not know of earlier.
- We have learnt the manner in which we should talk to people of our village as well as those of other villages.
- By doing this survey, we have found out about the expenditure in the families and have learnt the need to save.
- From the survey, we have learnt how to re-enroll children who have left school.
- From the survey we have understood the situation of our village very well.
- We have accurate information about the 8 Panchayats.



- We have become confident about transacting with the government. For example, in Belve Panchayat, we went and spoke to the Member of the Legislative Assembly Sri. Pratap Chandra Shetty about making pensions from the government available to widows.
- Irrespective of how important people are, we have got the confidence to talk to them.  
“Before the survey I had not spoken to the Panchayat President. After the survey, I have the courage and I know how to talk to him”.
- We have complete information about how a survey should be carried out in another Panchayat.
- We have learnt how we should be prepared in order to do a survey easily in another Panchayat.
- We have learnt about the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to carry out a survey.
- In the future if we have to do a survey, we have learnt what changes we should make. For example, we have learnt that the survey form should contain questions and pictures appropriate to each Panchayat.
- From the survey it is possible to develop friendship with people who have feelings of hatred towards us.

## After the data collection, what next?

From the survey of 7573 households, we have already identified many problems. It is not possible to tabulate this manually. So we have taken the help of computers. The data entry is being carried out by a team of professionals.

- From the information which we get with the help of computers, we will identify the problems of respective villages and prepare action plans to find solutions.
- We will go to the people of our village and say “We have compiled the information you have given us” and we will explain the information to them. We will find out and make sure that our information is correct. Then we will include it in the report. The report will be available with the Makkala Panchayats and Bhima Sangha. We will send the documentation to the Village Panchayat and other local level authorities. They may feel proud that this

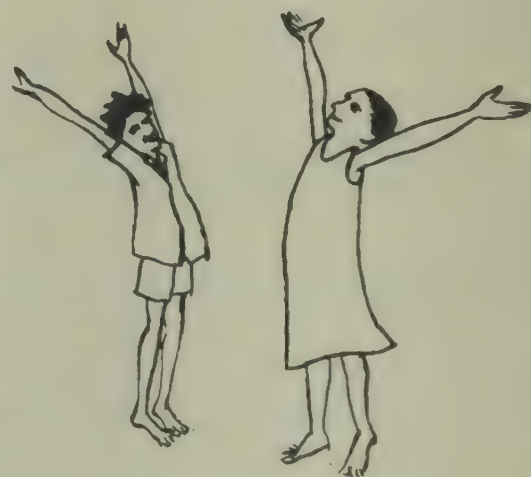


documentation has been prepared by working children themselves.

## Why the experience of the survey should be documented

Those of us who have done the survey have decided that we should document the survey experience. The documentation of the survey process should be placed in the adult's Panchayat so that the people have information about it.

- Children who will carry out surveys in the future should not face the problems we faced during our survey. That is why we have documented it.
- If we document the experience we had during the survey, when we talk to others it will be easy to give them information by showing them the documentation. Whenever we want, we can have a look at the documentation.
- We document because we do not want to keep on repeating mistakes when we do surveys.
- It is not necessary that we take information from adults when we do a survey in the future. With the help of this documentation we ourselves can give information.
- Others will know that this survey has been done by working children themselves, through our document.
- To learn about the experience of this survey done by Bhima Sangha and how it was done, this documentation is needed. This should be in the history of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats.
- In the future if children wish to carry out a survey, they need not receive the necessary information from adults, they could get it from us. We have to document all the information because it will help children learn.



















*For decades, children have been meek victims and passive recipients of adult benevolence. This is changing because it has become clear that most programmes and policies concerning children that have been formulated without their participation have either been ineffective or in many cases been detrimental to them. Since the ratification of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), it has been universally recognised that the principles of the CRC should become integral to the programming of all interventions related to children.*

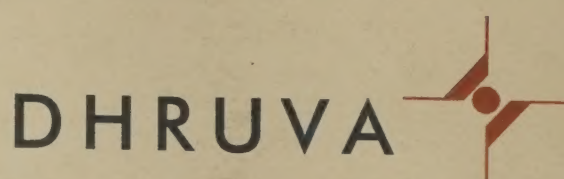
*DHRUVA was set up to meet the challenge facing society in the translation of CRC principles into action that is integrated into every aspect of a project and intervention that involve or impact upon children.*

*Children's field work for more than a decade in the area of children's participation, protagonism and governance and other successful examples Dhruva offers a variety of services.*

*It is committed to children's participation and the realisation of their rights and enables organisations and persons concerned with children's participation, protagonism, governance and related issues to perform their roles in a child friendly manner through training and consultancy in those areas of expertise.*

*Based on the extensive experience in several countries of the world and that of the Concerned for Working*

- \* Consultancy to enable organisations and corporates to develop child rights centred policy, strategy, programming and mechanisms for social audits.
- \* Training that enables those working with children and children themselves to enhance their tools, skills and knowledge base to make the principles of the CRC a living reality.



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